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Volume 36 Issue 2 Winter 2016



OUR COMMON HOME

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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Human Development Magazine is a quarterly publication for people involved in the work of fostering the growth of others. This includes persons involved in religious leadership and formation, spiritual direction, pastoral care and education interested in the development of the whole person.

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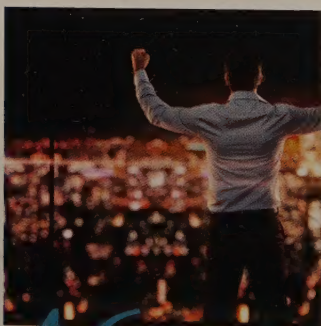
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Winter 2016

My brothers and sisters in the Lord,

I am delighted to share this issue of Human Development – “Our Common Home” – which seeks to show how Pope Francis’ Encyclical *Laudato Si’* resonates with our mission of working for the full human development of every person. Our spiritual and physical well-being depends on our grateful grounding in “our common home.”

When our editorial board first discussed the Pope’s encyclical, the question naturally arose: how exactly does his message apply to our readership? It became evident that we could speak about something called “personal ecology” – that is to say, the need to affirm each day in our thoughts, prayers and actions our partnership with God, each other and nature itself. Pope Francis was writing an encyclical, a “circular letter”, looking for a response. This issue of Human Development is our initial response to the Holy Father’s provocative questions. Each of us answer the Holy Father’s summons to conversion as we walk lightly and humbly, hand-in-hand with each other on the face of our good Earth.

The cover image of this issue presents something consoling and idyllic (especially for those of us in the midst of the harsh reality of winter): a child on the seashore with a dog. Air and sun, water and earth, human and animal all connect in peaceful harmony. But we know life is not always so. We recognize our own patterns of selfishness and wastefulness and the times we are too busy to enjoy the wonder of nature and forget that the world is not just a stage upon which we tread but an expansive “family room” we share with all other living beings. Hence the choice, to use as our guiding text, Gerard Manley Hopkins, sonnet “God’s Grandeur.” Hopkins captures both the cheerful glee of the child and the painful reality of a world bleared and seared by our choices. Most importantly, like Pope Francis, Hopkins reminds us that the Holy Spirit breathes over us the perpetual promise of a new and eternal spring.

Writing from the context of a community seeking to live many of their teachings of the encyclical, Kathleen Fischer offers our first essay “Create New Hearts In Us, O God.” She reminds us of the importance of wonder and the possibility and privilege of reading “the book of nature.” Sister Ilia Delio stretches our minds and hearts to a cosmic vision wherein respect for the environment is actually an experience of the mercy of God. She reminds us we will find “wholeness” only when we look at ourselves and all creation with the same eyes of mercy that characterized St. Francis of Assisi centuries ago. Sister Mary Ellen Sheehan shows the resonance of the Jesuit poet-scientist-mystic, Teilhard de Chardin, with the encyclical. With poetic imagery, Sr. Elizabeth Johnson opens up for us a new perspective on ecology by rooting it in a very unlikely place – the Book of Job! She challenges us to experience a “conversion to the earth.” Finally, Sister Dianne Bergant helps us to see new depths and challenges in Genesis 1 & 2, one of the theological reasons which motivated Pope Francis.

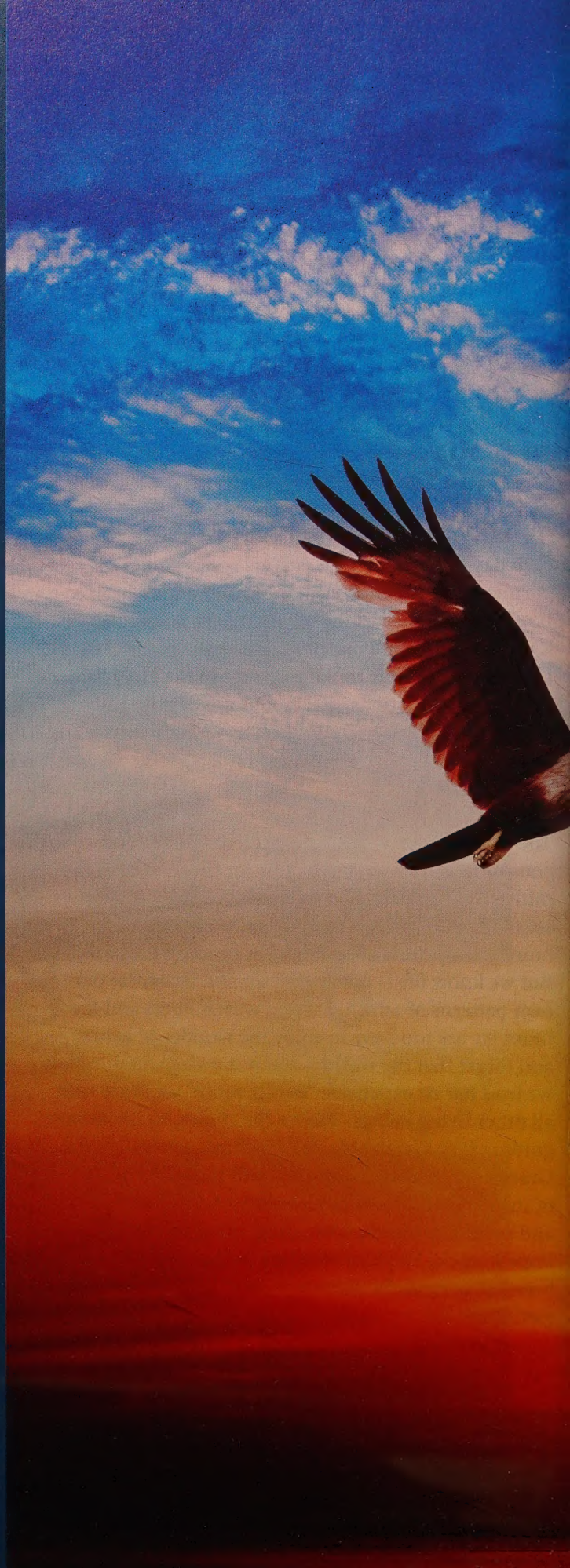
The spectrum of wisdom in this issue – like the very encyclical itself – stretches from the most minute particle of life to things beyond imagining, from the micro to the macro. As Pope Francis said in his encyclical, in the Eucharist, heaven and Earth are joined, creation is divinized and we move toward the heavenly wedding feast and union with God (see article 236). May we celebrate the redeeming work of God that unfolds in every moment of our journey in this, our common home.

Your brother in the Lord,

Msgr. John P. Zeng

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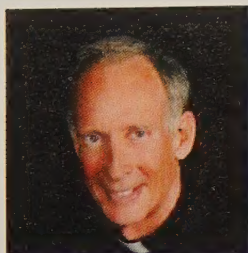
God's Grandeur

- Gerard Manley Hopkins

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

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April 4-7, 2016

Alumni Men's Retreat

Guest House-Scripps Mansion
Lake Orion, MI

May 20, 2016

60th Anniversary Mass & Luncheon

Guest House-Scripps Mansion Chapel
Lake Orion, MI

May 21, 2016

2nd Annual Run Over Addiction 5K Run/Walk

Guest House Campus
Lake Orion, MI

May 21, 2016

60th Anniversary Picnic

Guest House Campus
Lake Orion, MI

June 13, 2016

31st Annual Golf Classic

Oakhurst Golf & Country Club
Clarkston, MI

July 3-9, 2016

Alumnae ICAP/Guest House Retreat

Carmelite Spiritual Center
Darien, IL

August 2-4, 2016

Alumni Reunion

Holy Cross Retreat Center
LaPorte, IN

August 7-13, 2016

Alumnae ICAP/Guest House Retreat

Guest House-Scripps Mansion
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Kathleen Fischer



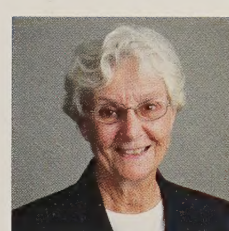
Ilia Delio, OSF



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INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS

Editors of Human Development are quite eager to publish articles that translate the latest research in psychology, health, medicine, and spirituality to ministry, formation and practice. Our hope is that Human Development will be known as the most user-friendly ministry publication. This will require making complicated theoretical knowledge, research, and concepts understandable and applicable to the personal and professional lives of our readers.

Our ministry is in a time of significant transition and change, we anticipate that the articles we publish will enlighten and positively influence the daily decisions and practices of those in Church leadership, ministry formation, spiritual direction, and counseling of any faith. There are also a number of previously underappreciated forces that uniquely influence ministry of ministers: cultural, organizational, and situational factors. We intend to highlight and honor these factors on the pages of Human Development. Accordingly, we ask prospective authors to be mindful of these considerations in their manuscripts.

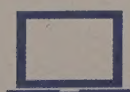
Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are

not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than six recommended citations and or readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting sacred scripture, the New Revised Standard Version is preferred. All manuscripts are to be prepared according to the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th edition).

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and Bibliography/suggested readings. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Manuscripts should be submitted to Msgr. Zenz at editor@hdmag.org as an email attachment.

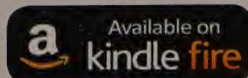
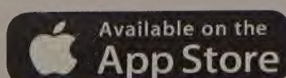


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CREATE NEW HEARTS IN US, O GOD

Kathleen Fischer



Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* makes clear that we all need a complete turnabout in our relationship with the Earth, a transformation that can be sustained only if it is rooted in a spiritual vision. Though the profound conversion asked of us comes ultimately as God's gift, there are several ways we can be more disposed to God's grace. I will discuss here several key elements of an "ecological spirituality" needed to open us to divine grace.

BEGINNING WITH WONDER

Cultivating the emotion of wonder may seem a weak response to a world teetering on the edge of ecological catastrophe. But spirituality begins in wonder, the experience that discloses the transcendent dimension of existence and reveals the sacred depth found in ordinary things. Wonder makes it impossible to see creation primarily as a commodity to be bought and sold. We learn instead to regard it as a sacrament of the divine, a holy reality to be approached in veneration and awe.

Recently I experienced a small example of the link between wonder and care of creation. I was walking near the University of Washington campus on a sunny October day as light fell on trees whose leaves had begun turning orange, scarlet, and gold. As a university student passed me on the sidewalk, he remarked to me, a complete stranger: "It's a beautiful day, isn't it? I love it!" The bounce in his step as he walked past me shook the backpack he was carrying, conveying the lightness of his spirit. Just as I started to agree with him, he stopped to pick up empty coffee cups and food wrappers scattered on the sidewalk and carried them to nearby recycling bins.

Many prophetic voices, including that of Thomas Berry, the renowned Christian advocate for the natural world, insist that our planet can be saved only if we are convinced of the sacredness of creation. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis warns that when we approach nature without wonder, we bring the stance of a master and consumer, and end up exploiting the environment.

We cannot induce wonder. It arises within us spontaneously as we pay attention to the world around us. We bury tulip and daffodil bulbs in the fall, and the bright colorful blooms that appear in the spring fill us with awe. We get acquainted with the different kinds of rain, the varieties of sky, the sliver of moon gradually expanding. We take in the beauty of a coral reef, a snow-capped mountain peak, a cascading waterfall, a majestic oak tree. We are pulled out of ourselves into the divine mystery and amazing largesse. Our gratitude and love for the universe deepen, and with the psalmist we join all creation in a song of praise: "In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures" (Ps 104:24). Contemplating the universe in this way, turning a loving gaze toward its realities, means slowing the pace at which we rush through our lives. In today's wired world, it may also require setting aside our electronic devices for a while.

Wonder moves us toward openness and connection. In contemplation, we have a particularly strong sense of the present and its fullness. We are not taken up with planning action toward other creatures, thinking, for example, of ways to cut down ancient red cedars to make way for a "development," or pondering how much money a large catch of Chinook salmon might bring. Rather, wonder at old growth forests or a run of fish pulls us out of ourselves as we reach toward the source of life and beauty. Notice how children express this sentiment in their own spontaneous way. They lift their hands or reach their arms toward a peacock or sunset; they giggle with delight at ocean spray.

The ethical theorist Martha Nussbaum is convinced that no other emotion matches wonder's ability to increase empathy and compassion. Through wonder we come to appreciate the intrinsic value of each aspect of the cosmos and every human person. The tug of another creature in all its amazing complexity enables us to move beyond self-interest to recognize and respond to other beings on their own terms. The mystery of existence itself - not the usefulness of this or that object - becomes the focus of interest.

My own spirituality has been rooted in wonder from childhood. I grew up on acreage in the fertile farmlands of the Willamette Valley near Salem, Oregon. Since the tiny house where I spent my childhood could barely hold my parents and their seven kids, my brothers and sisters and I spent our summers exploring the terrain. Outside the dark and cramped rooms of our home, I discovered countless marvels: wild roses entwining the front porch railing, cherry blossoms dancing in orchard breezes, sunlight glittering on the Willamette River. These sights were sacred disclosures, connections with the Divine as powerful for me as the rosaries and litanies I faithfully recited in our parish church.

We cannot induce wonder. It arises within us spontaneously as we pay attention to the world around us...We are pulled out of ourselves into the divine mystery and amazing largesse.



But my relationship with nature lacked a component that Pope Francis reminds us is central to an integral ecology: hearing the cries of the Earth and the poor. I never heard the Earth groaning. I failed to notice that it yearned for release from the pesticides clinging to strawberries and pole beans, from the cans and bottles floating in the river, from the chain saws leveling precious evergreen trees. Though I found God in creation, I regarded the natural world mostly as there to feed and comfort me, its reserves vast and unlimited. Only decades later did I realize that my love of creation called for a major change in this mindset, a reigning in of my wants and needs for the sake of the well-being of all others in our common home.

TRANSFORMING OUR DESIRES

A young man who once came to me for counseling told me that whenever he reached into his shirt pocket for a cigarette and then started mindlessly drawing on it, he felt that somehow—in a way he could not put into words—he was reaching for God. It dawned on me that he was speaking for all of us. There resides in each of us an insatiable thirst that nothing seems to slake. We crave this or that thing, but what we really want lies much deeper. This emptiness in us is “the God space.”

Augustine said it best some centuries ago in his *Confessions*: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” Since desire unrecognized for what it is fuels rampant consumerism, imprisoning the Earth as well as ourselves, becoming free requires that we embrace simplicity as a way of life. Consumerism thrives by convincing us that we do not yet possess what we need for happiness. It disguises itself in suggestions that something else will finally make us happy—new clothes, a better car, a smarter phone. But as long as we amass material things and measure our worth by how much we possess, we will never have enough. Our hearts will remain hollow, while we savage the Earth. As Isaiah cried out in a challenge to the people of Israel: “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” (55:2).

An ancient Zen tale captures the way the pursuits of a consumerist society keep us from the riches for which we long. As a monk sits outside his hut on a mountainside, admiring the splendor of a full moon, a thief creeps up the path and confronts him, demanding that he give him all he owns. The monk replies that his hut is empty and he owns only the clothes he is

wearing, but he is happy to share the beauty of the night sky. When the thief again demands that the monk give him his possessions, the monk hands him his clothes. As the thief carries the bundle of clothing down the mountainside, the monk sighs and thinks what a poor man the thief is: "I wish I could give him this beautiful moon."

Simplicity provides a way out of our predicament as citizens of wealthy nations, offering us a path to contentment that does not deplete our planet and its people. "Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out," Jesus says, "an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Lk 12:33-34). When we focus on the one thing necessary, we no longer want many things. Rooted in the love of God we experience the joy that only God can give. This is good news for the Earth too.

A spiritual practice that supports this quest for simplicity is the biblical maxim to give thanks always. One way to do this is to end each day with quiet time—however brief—during which we call to mind in prayer all that we are grateful for from that day and from the larger blessings that frame our lives. We might begin with the miracle of life itself. Or the stunning beauty of the cosmos. For when we no longer take for granted what we have, we are not dreaming that we need something more.

Breaking the chains of consumerism requires recognition that we belong to one vast community, that our future is intimately linked with that of the fox and the polar bear, the turtle and the honey bee, the planets and the stars, and to each poor and suffering person in the universe. It becomes clear that Creation care is a part of any life that seeks to be genuinely human.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul speaks eloquently of this kinship with all of creation. The good news of the gospel extends not just to human beings, Paul says, but to all of Earth's inhabitants. The Earth's redemption hinges on human faithfulness: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God" (Rom 8:19). In a striking image, Paul depicts creation as a woman looking forward to giving birth: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption

of our bodies." (Rom 8: 22-23). The Spirit not only accompanies us in our pain but, like a midwife, actually assists with the birth of the new creation.

READING THE BOOK OF NATURE

Laudato Si' reminds us that following Jesus means being closely attuned to the natural world. Turning to the gospels, we see how this is so. Jesus' teachings are steeped in parables and analogies drawn from nature. He notes God's care for the glorious lilies of the field (Mt 6: 28-30). He understands that when branches are pruned, they yield yet more fruit (Jn 15:1-5). He has studied the myriad ways farmers sow seeds, and has watched tiny grains mature into fields ripe for harvest (Mt 13:18-23, Mk 4:26-29). As if anticipating our time of vanishing species, Jesus assures us that even the fall of a sparrow matters (Lk 12:6).

An ancient contemplative practice provides us with a simple way to encounter the divine presence in nature as Jesus did. This method of prayer is usually known by its Latin name, *lectio divina*, which literally means divine or sacred reading, and it usually refers to prayer with a passage of scripture or another sacred text. But it can also be used with the book of nature. In his encyclical, Pope Francis writes of the way Saint Francis of Assisi referred to nature as "a magnificent book" in which we can hear God speaking to us and through our reverent openness we can glimpse the divine beauty and goodness in nature.

Lectio is not primarily a way of reading for information; rather it is essentially a practice through which we let God's word gradually transform our hearts and minds. Drawn from the Benedictine tradition, it consists of four progressive movements: reading and hearing the word of God, meditation on that word, expressing the prayers that arise in us, and then simply resting in the divine love.

We can practice *lectio* with any aspect of the natural world—while sitting or walking in a beautiful place, standing alone under a night sky, or gathered in a group with others. You might, for example, use *lectio* to listen to the ocean. We know that even in the complete darkness of its deepest recesses, colorful sea creatures exist in designs beyond our imagining. The reflection and prayer that arise during a contemplative encounter with the sea might include expressions of sorrow over all that we humans pour into our drains unmindful that it





flows to the oceans, or repentance for the cans, bottles, and plastic bags that we discard on beaches. Or your response might be a cry of amazement at the spectacle of billowing waves and the vast array of sea creatures, a prayer of praise like that of the psalmist: "Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great" (Ps 104:25).

When several people together ponder nature using the pattern of *lectio*, they enrich their individual experiences by sharing reflections and prayers as well as the final contemplative silence. As a way of reading the book of nature, *lectio* thus deepens our communal experience of God's presence in creation through slow and reverent listening. We invite God's love to take hold of us and all other creatures; this is the foundation for an integral ecology.

In giving retreats, I have often encouraged participants' contemplation of nature by sending them out to spend some time with an aspect of it: a tree, an anthill, a meandering stream. Just silently sit with it, I suggest, and learn what it has to teach you. My instructions echo the book of Job, one of the bible's most extensive and eloquent pieces of poetry celebrating the community of creation.

But ask the animals, and they will teach you;
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you (12:7-8).

Retreatants frequently return with a prayer, a poem, or a dance inspired by their experience. They marvel anew at the countless colors and textures of flowers and birds, the brilliance strewn everywhere. Encountering creation again as a sacrament of the divine, they have a renewed sense of the significance of the loss of a single species.

Other emotions emerge as well: grief at the disappearance of remembered landscapes and bird songs now gone silent, guilt and regret at recognition of our role in the destruction of creation's diversity and beauty. Sometimes these retreatants are immersed as well in the groaning and struggle of nature, the violence, decay, and death they witness as creation also awaits redemption and renewal. As they dare to name all these responses, they create a healing communal ritual of celebration, repentance, and resolve.

When we read that the Pacific Northwest is desperately battling drought and wildfires, that citizens of Nepal are seeing massive flooding and mudslides, that residents of Beijing and New Delhi are dying prematurely because of the toxic air they breathe, we may be tempted to close our windows, lock our doors, and give thanks that our homes are not located in those regions. Living in a century centered on the individual, the age of the “selfie,” we may be deluded into thinking that we can create an island of safety for ourselves. But these destructive events are not about distant strangers; they are about us. And they are about generations not even yet born. We live in a universe where everything is interconnected and impacts everything else. Not even a monk in a remote region of Tibet, or the oxygen molecules we breathe, remain untouched by the entire process of life on our planet. We share one climate, one ocean, one air, and one Earth as our only home.

Our love of nature therefore rings hollow if we stop with wonder and contemplation, if we seek spiritual renewal in the wilderness, but ignore injustices such as the dumping of toxic waste in vulnerable communities and impoverished countries. We are to find the face of God not only in a stunning sunflower or sunset, but in every human face, however different from our own. We must see with the eyes of the poor who live in neighborhoods lacking clean drinking water or proper sewers, where streets are littered with garbage, where children grow up in the midst of disease-bearing mosquitoes, rats, and cockroaches. Environmental disasters—severe weather, crop failure, rising seas—disproportionately affect those who have contributed least to them and who have few resources to deal with them. Consider, for example, how Bangladesh is threatened by floods from melting Himalayan glaciers, and then by drought as glacier-fed rivers dry up. Or the way Arctic communities find their local villages uninhabitable as permafrost begins to thaw.

In a universe in which all living things form one body, care of the Earth commits us to work for peace and justice. From its opening identification of the Earth as our common home, *Laudato Si'* draws on the Catholic tradition of the common good. The biblical roots of this teaching lie in the Hebrew Scriptures, with their prophetic call to care for the widow, the orphan, and the stranger, and to move beyond our own needs to those of the most vulnerable (Zech 7:8-10). In the prophetic tradition within which Jesus situates his ministry, the land and the people flourish or wither together. When sin takes root in the hearts of the people, “the wine dries up, the vine languishes. . . all joy has reached its eventide, the gladness of the earth is banished.” (Isa 24:7, 11). In contrast, when the Spirit of God finds hospitality in the universe, when God reigns in people’s hearts, mountains and hills break into song and trees clap their hands (Isa 55:12). Human and nonhuman redemption are integrally related.

How do we go about finding a role for ourselves in the present crisis, in addition to changes in our own lifestyle? There are countless possibilities. In keeping with his Jesuit formation in Ignatian spirituality, Pope Francis tells us that the answers lie in our unique talents, experience, culture, and position. He insists that everyone must become part of the process of renewal. Helpful guidance in finding small as well as large ways of working for the common good can be found in the life of Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker. Dorothy knew how to practice both personal charity on a small scale and non-violent action against war and injustice on a large scale. She answered her call in the messy practicalities of soup kitchens and clothing distribution centers at her houses of hospitality, and in controversial actions for peace and justice which several times led to her arrest and imprisonment.

When people asked Dorothy Day what they could do in the face of world problems that loom so large, she referred them to the little way of Therese of Lisieux.

Our love of nature therefore rings hollow if we stop with wonder and contemplation, if we seek spiritual renewal in the wilderness, but ignore injustices such as the dumping of toxic waste in vulnerable communities and impoverished countries.

Our small project happens to be just one piece of a growing global movement on behalf of the environment, a chorus of possibility nurturing the fragile seeds of change. Though negative events generally dominate the news, a positive vision for our planet is buoyed by knowing that millions of people throughout the world are now working for social justice and the environment, two inseparable causes.

Dorothy felt that Therese had shown us how to find peace in our own hearts and to love even when it is hard to love, thus enlarging the amount of love and peace in the world. Even before scientists made clear our cosmic connection to all of creation, Dorothy Day too was convinced that every act of love increases the sum of love in the universe and every act of hate adds to the burden of its evil.

FINDING HOPE IN COMMUNITY

Cataclysmic visions of the Earth's and our own future are now commonplace. They can be found not only in books, films, and media reports, but in scientific journals as well. Though these depictions of a ravaged and uninhabitable planet Earth offer stark warnings of the global consequences of failure to address climate change, they can as easily lead to despair as to conversion. Why bother to act if what we do is too little and too late? Why not simply tune out the dreadful facts and enjoy what time remains? Ecological conversion depends on the hope that a different future is possible. It trusts in a God who has promised to be with us always. Such hope is nurtured in community.

One morning I looked out at an empty lot near our home and felt a rising concern about its ugliness. Ours is a diverse neighborhood whose residents come from many ethnic and religious groups. We support a large homeless population and provide countless services, including a food bank, a drop-in center, and a free health clinic. Also nearby are apartments for low income residents, and housing for veterans who struggle with addiction and mental illness.

Believing that our neighborhood deserved better than this empty lot strewn with beer bottles and discarded appliances—a symbol of neglect and hopelessness—I called the city and asked them to do something about their property. In response, they offered me a neighborhood grant if I would turn the space into a nature preserve. So a group of us volunteered to clear the rubbish and invasive plants, and put in bare-root plants, thin as pencils. We watered, weeded, and hoped for the best. That was fifteen years ago. Today vine maple, red-twig dogwood, thimbleberry and other native plants support a fully developed habitat for countless species that have made it their home.

What I had not expected when I began the project was how the site would become a locus for community hope and action. A blind volunteer dug holes just the right size and depth for each kind of plant, a teenager chose the habitat for his service project and quickly learned that we are just one being on a tree of life, a recovering alcoholic came to weed and prune, and a man living in low income housing offered to help



because the scent of mock orange wafting to his window lifted his spirits. Like an oasis in a desert, the nature preserve drew other neighbors who stopped to breathe in the smell of wild roses, donate native plants, read our interpretive sign or simply say thank you.

Our small project happens to be just one piece of a growing global movement on behalf of the environment, a chorus of possibility nurturing the fragile seeds of change. Though negative events generally dominate the news, a positive vision for our planet is buoyed by knowing that millions of people throughout the world are now working for social justice and the environment, two inseparable causes. Pope Francis acknowledges this

labor in *Laudato Si'*, and he thanks those who are already making so many diverse contributions.

A quick survey of websites or church bulletins provides countless examples of action at every level. More people are finding ways to use alternate transportation, getting out of their cars to walk, bike, or ride buses. In the process of setting aside their own vehicles, they are experiencing solidarity with the poor, homeless, elderly, and ethnically mixed populations who do not own cars and therefore have always relied on public transportation. Others are constructing energy efficient buildings, fighting to save endangered species, initiating legal or political processes, teaching students about care



of the environment, lobbying for clean water and air, and learning how to conserve water and energy.

An inspirational example of such action comes from Brazil, which is experiencing one of the worst droughts in its history. In many places reservoirs are dry, and water is being rationed. Scientists studying these events are using their skills to help us understand the way large scale deforestation throughout South America is not only contributing to Brazil's extreme drought, but significantly altering the world's climate. The cutting of forests in the Amazon may be influencing droughts in places as far away as California, Texas, and New Mexico. Many of these climate experts are therefore calling for an immediate end to deforestation and the planting of new forests.

On another continent, the bishop elect of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Fredrick Shoo, did not need scientists to tell him that the climate was changing. He noticed it several decades ago, and began his crusade to save the glaciers on Mount Kilimanjaro and preserve his people's water sources. Undaunted by the complexity and global scope of the problem, Shoo and 100,000 of his parishioners started planting trees. Young

people plant trees when they receive Confirmation, and couples plant a tree at the end of their marriage ceremony. Over the course of twelve years, Bishop Shoo estimates they have planted 3.7 million trees. Shoo, who firmly believes we have a moral obligation to care for creation and assure the well-being of future generations, has appropriately become known as "The Tree Bishop."

The Creative Spirit is urging each of us to join this community of action on behalf of an integral ecology. But, as Pope Francis notes in *Laudato Si'*, we may be tempted to respond with indifference, denial, resignation, or an unwarranted confidence that technical solutions can save us. Ever the pastor, however, he assures us that radical change is possible, and that the Creator of our beloved planet Earth will not forsake us during these dark times. Ecological conversion may prove to be one of those costly graces, demanding difficult changes of us. And so we must pray without ceasing: Create new hearts in us, O God.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Think about the last time you were moved to a sense of wonder at some aspect of natural beauty – perhaps a rising or setting sun at the beach, a mountain-top view, the crunch of fresh snow underfoot, the smell of a pine forest. Did you have a sense of “oneness” between yourself and nature? Were you moved to prayer with creation (that is to say “praying” as creation also in its own way was praising the Lord)?

Do I feel any sense of distress as I experience effects of pollution or disasters caused by human error or greed? Have I been moved to action or prayer?

Pope Francis has linked environmental concerns with social justice issues: How do I live out that connection on a daily basis? Do these issues impact my prayer – for instance as I read the psalms which often praise God for creation’s goodness and lament human violence?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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EARTH COMMUNITY AND MERCY CONSCIOUSNESS

Ilia Delio, OSF



In his ground-breaking encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis calls for a new catholicity, one that expresses a new consciousness of belonging to a global community. "Catholicity" means having a "sense of the whole" or consciousness of belonging to the whole. Catholicity, like consciousness itself, is not a static, fixed ideal. Rather, it is an expression of human awareness in relation to the surrounding world; a thread connecting the human person and the cosmos. Catholicity undergirds the question: Are we aware of belonging to a whole greater than our own immediate vision?

I contend that our "ecological" crisis is actually a crisis of catholicity; that is, a crisis of consciousness that lacks a sense of the whole. I would like to examine the roots of this crisis by first exploring the unmaking and remaking of the western mind. Then, in light of this Year of Mercy, I would like to ask what type of consciousness is needed for a world of mercy that builds community. I will look briefly at the life of Jesus and Saint Francis of Assisi from the perspective of the relationship between consciousness and mercy. Finally I will explore the challenges we face in our struggle for a merciful world today.

THE UNMAKING OF THE WESTERN MIND

Many authors attribute the problems of our age to human action but I would suggest that the problems of our age begin with the human mind which, in the deepest metaphysical sense, has become "lost." British psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist claims that a divided mind has been the unmaking of the western world. He argues that for the first time in Western civilization a predominance of left brain function emerged just as Greek culture was beginning to pass its peak. Prior to 4th c. BC there had been a healthy blending of science and the arts; both right and left hemispheres worked in harmony.

To appreciate his thesis it is helpful to understand how the right and left hemispheres pay attention to the world in very different ways. The right hemisphere sees the world at large, not as a separate object. Our connection to the world of nature and the human community. The right brain is open to new events, ideas, words, skills or music. The right brain is the spacious mind that sees the self as part of the whole and engages life from a place of interdependence and compassion.

The left hemisphere specializes in analyzing data and forming logical connections. In a sense, the left brain is the narrow mind which is shown in either/or thinking; it reduces things to certainty while the right hemisphere opens them up to possibility. The narrow mind imagines itself as separate from the world. Scarcity defines the world of the narrow mind; fear is its primary emotion, and anger its most common expression. Things appear discrete,

independent, and competing or "looking out for number one." It is adept at procedures but sees them as ends in themselves. It is good for only one thing--manipulating the world and controlling the parts.

The intellectual framework for modern science grew out of the medieval scholastic method which began with a hypothetical question followed by deductive reason. The rise of modern science eventually gave way to the systematization of knowledge, as things were reduced to parts. Philosopher Mark Taylor identifies the decisive turning point in human development through the work of René Descartes who tried to reconcile the picture of a mechanical world with belief in God. Whereas Copernicus had displaced the human from the center of the universe by discovering that the earth circles the sun, Descartes insisted that everything revolves around the human. His famous *cognito* - "I think, therefore I am" - drew a strong line of separation between matter and spirit and shifted the knowledge of God from nature to the individual mind. The human person became self-determining, gaining mastery over that which exists as a whole. That is, the cosmos was replaced by the feeling of being a separate, thinking individual. The combination of heliocentrism and Cartesian dualism created a radical disconnect between God, human and cosmos that eventually found a sense of law and order in Newton's world machine marked by the detached observer and mechanistic determinism. The "price" of all this was the loss and place for human consciousness; everything is a "machine."

We have no sense how we and our fellow humans fit into the big picture. . .without a big picture we are very small people.



BIG BANG CONSCIOUSNESS

The artificial separation between humans and cosmos, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin said, lies at the core of our contemporary moral confusion. Similarly, Nancy Abrams and Joel Primack write: "There is a profound connection between our lack of a shared cosmology and our increasing global problems. We have no sense how we and our fellow humans fit into the big picture. . . without a big picture we are very small people."1 The separation between mind and matter arose with the Cartesian need for certainty whereby the mind was artificially separated from the spinning Earth, rendering the human person a detached observer rather than an active participant in the cosmic whole. This separation was overcome in the early twentieth century when, following Einstein's theory of special relativity, matter and energy were no longer seen as autonomous entities but two aspects of the same reality: quantum physics was born.

This quantum world is composed of deeply entangled fields of energy in such a way that we can speak of undivided wholeness at the heart of the universe. The phenomenon known as quantum entanglement means that two quantum particles that at one time interact and then move away from each other are forever bonded and act as though they were one thing regardless of the distance between them. Reality is nonlocal; things can affect one another despite distance or space-time

coordinates. The idea of nonlocal action at a distance requires a connection that travels faster than light, an idea which greatly troubled Einstein. However David Bohm, a contemporary of Einstein, proposed an alternate view of reality.

Rather than starting with the parts and explaining the whole in terms of the parts, Bohm started with a notion of undivided wholeness and derived the parts as abstractions from the whole. He called this unbroken order "implicate order," indicating an enfolding of events. Implicate order is a way of looking at reality not merely in terms of external interactions between things, but in terms of the internal (enfolded) relationships among things. Whereas classical physics is based on parts making up wholes, Bohm took relationships between parts as primary. Each part is connected with every other part at the quantum level. The whole is the basic reality so that being is intrinsically relational and exists as unbroken wholeness in a system. The notion of implicate order led Bohm to say that while human beings and societies may seem separate, in our roots we are part of an indivisible whole and share in the same cosmic process.

By the time he completed his final work, *The Undivided Universe* (2002), Bohm had come to realize that active information forms the bridge between the mental and the physical, neither of which can be reduced to the other. He postulated that humans participate in "a greater collective mind, in principle, capable of going indefinitely beyond even the human species as a whole" (2002, 386). Here one sees Bohm as an intuitive physicist apprehending something that is both immanent and transcendent at the heart of reality. Although he never explicitly mentioned God in relation to implicate order, Bohm came very close to the theology of Teilhard de Chardin who described a centering principle in evolution which he identified as Omega, the absolute unity of wholeness or the depth center of reality.

GOD-OMEGA

Teilhard identified Omega as God and said that



God is not conceivable except insofar as God coincides with everything that exists. God is a "hyper-center," of greater depth than anything that exists."² By positing God Omega within evolution, Teilhard induced a theological shift. God is not the static first cause; rather God is the future of everything that exists; that is, the future of the world is already centered within present reality. The universe rests on Omega as its sole support.

Science tells us that we are already an undivided whole, religion indicates that God is the absolute whole at heart of dynamic life. Evolution, Teilhard indicated, is the process by which life unfolds into more life, a process marked by attraction of elements, complexity of relationships and a rise in consciousness. If God Omega is at the center of physical life, empowering evolution from within, then God Omega is also the transcendent center of life, the goal toward which evolution is moving. Hence, created, contingent life is oriented toward the fullness of life or, as Saint Paul wrote, creation lives in hope that "God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

How evolution proceeds toward the fullness of life occupied much of Teilhard's thoughts and writings. Taking his cue from the new physics, he considered matter and consciousness not as two substances or two different modes of existence but as two aspects of the same cosmic reality. He speculated that each individual element has two distinct components: a tangential energy or energy of attraction, drawing elements together, which he called love-energy, and radial energy or the energy of consciousness which draws elements toward more centered and complex states.

The sheer reality of evolution, Teilhard indicated, points to a fundamental law of attraction at the heart of cosmic life. Love is the energy of attraction and consciousness is the energy of transcendence but one cannot exist adequately without the other. This led him to suggest that the physical structure of the universe is love wherein cosmic life transcends toward greater consciousness: love and consciousness undergird the dynamism of

life. There is no love without consciousness and no consciousness without love. We can understand these two dimensions on the human level when we realize that, what we love we are deeply conscious of and what draws our consciousness leads to greater love, if it is an engagement of transcendence. Consciousness without love is lifeless and love without consciousness is selfish. Apathy is the absence of both love and consciousness, since one is neither conscious of another nor attracted to the other; one is like a cog in a machine. Only love that is conscious gives life, and consciousness that deepens love draws life toward more life.

Evolution, in Teilhard's view, is an immense complexification of consciousness or psychic energy by which consciousness eventually becomes more aware of itself. The human person is integrally part of evolution in that we rise from the process, but in reflecting on the process we stand apart from it. He defined reflection as "the power acquired by consciousness to turn in upon itself, to take possession of itself as an object. . . no longer merely to know, but to know that one knows."³ We are evolution become conscious of itself. It is not as if we humans are finished products, however, the final act of God's creation. As Beatrice Bruteau wrote: "We are not a thing but an activity."⁴ This "activity" is God-Omega or God's action in the very actuality of acting; divine Love constantly invites us to more being and life by drawing us into the center of divine activity.

Mercy is divine Love at the heart of evolutionary life because the heart of God unconditionally empowers life so that every creature may be drawn into new life. As each element and creature is drawn by God to God, love deepens and consciousness rises; or simply put, the deepening of love is the rise of consciousness. Through this binary movement of love and consciousness, God emerges in human thought in such a way that God and self are unified and differentiated. Through meditation and prayer one is aware that the "I" of self is not alone and neither is God alone, for

the self that desires to possess God is already possessed by God. By focusing our minds on love, consciousness of self and consciousness of God become unified in a coincidence of opposites, and this unity is the felt experience of belonging to the whole.

MERCY: A HEART FULL OF LOVE: JESUS AND FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Thanks to his deep consciousness of oneness with God His Father, Jesus easily moved into solidarity with others. As Jim Marion writes, "Jesus saw there was no separation between himself and any other person. . . .He saw all human beings (and indeed the whole created universe) as part of himself."⁵ Out of a deep unity with God Omega, mercy flowed wherever Jesus encountered fragile life whether poor or oppressed, diseased or disabled, prostitutes, tax collectors or public sinners.

The word "mercy," from the Latin *miserecordia*, means "a heart sensitive to the misery of others." Mercy is love expressed on a higher level of unitive relationship. One feels the pain of another and, without demands, embraces the other as sister or brother. Like the prodigal father, Jesus freely expressed the overflowing merciful love of God: the healing of the lepers, the healing of the blind man, the forgiveness of sins; even eating with a tax collector! Through the deep God-consciousness of Jesus, mercy is revealed as heart-space where love graciously goes out to embrace the blind and lame, the wounded and suffering.

The path to a merciful world for Jesus is recognizing the immanent presence of God. Angela of Foligno, a medieval Franciscan mystic, wrote: "As we see so we love and the more perfectly and purely we see, the more perfectly and purely we love."⁶ Vision is a matter of consciousness, a visible awareness that the God in me is the same God in you; we are bound together. Jesus constantly challenged others to "see," to awaken to the presence of God and to be part of an undivided whole, the "kingdom" of God, where Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, male and female, are

invited as equals to the divine banquet. He had strong words for those who claimed to see but were blind and oppressive to the weak and fragile. Jesus reminded them that God desires mercy not sacrifice, a heart open to others not legal specialists. As we are mercified by the gracious love of God, he indicated, so too we are to show mercy to others by making space within us to welcome the wounded, the poor and lonely, the cranky and the cantankerous. Mercy thrives on the consciousness of love.

Many of the saints learned the path to merciful love but Saint Francis of Assisi stands out. In his youth, Francis wanted to be a famous knight but he was wounded in battle. After he recovered, he started to wander into abandoned churches to pray. Praying before the San Damiano cross, he had a deep personal experience of God's compassionate love. The event that changed his life was his encounter with the leper. As an ambitious youth who sought fame and glory, Francis had a great disdain for lepers; as soon as he saw a leper, he would hold his nose and run away. After he experienced God's merciful love in the San Damiano cross, Francis met a leper along the road. Instead of showing disgust, Francis dismounted his horse, gave the leper alms and kissed the leper's hand. This experience marked a profound turn of events in his life. By experiencing God's love for him in the crucified Christ, Francis experienced the same goodness of God in the kiss of the leper. Recounting the experience at the end of his life he wrote: "What was bitter had turned into sweetness of soul and body."⁷

Through the cross he came to a new awareness of God's merciful love. Love opened him up to the divine mystery at the heart of everything. He realized that the God of his life was the God of every life and he called all creatures "brother and sister." Each and every thing, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, had infinite value because it reflected God in its own unique being - earthworms in the middle of road, bees freezing in winter - Francis attended to every creature with grace and respect. He called himself "brother" not



as a title but as a structure of reality. He lived in solidarity with all creation because his life was part of every other life—bird, tree, rabbit, human—all were bound together in the compassionate love of God. Even at the end of his life when he was blind and wracked with disease, as expressed in the Canticum of Creatures. His inner world was light-filled; his life shows that when we live in the gift of God's merciful love, we discover the whole Earth as pregnant with God." We discover the truth of ourselves as part of a cosmic family and we live with a new reality of belonging together, bound in the heart of God's mercy.

THE MERCY VISION OF POPE FRANCIS

Pope Francis has a vision for a new world rooted in merciful love. We have constructed a world, however, that warrants against such a vision. The problems of our age—war, conflict, racial and religious injustice, economic greed, power, corruption, control and manipulation, lying and deceit—are human problems. We have become detached from the cosmos, detached from our minds and detached from our own existence. We live, as Beatrice Bruteau wrote, on the grid of partiality: "A pattern of partialities is not a whole world, and its unwholesomeness is only too evident now, ranging all the way from personal hostilities, through economic and social injustices,

ethnic and religious strife, class hatred, to international conflicts and global warfare."⁸ Partial consciousness results in patterns of power that are separatist and exclusivist. This type of consciousness coupled with narrow vision and mechanistic paradigms perpetuates outdated attitudes of fears, suspicions and selfishness of nation states and their continued insistence on the primacy of unlimited national sovereignty. We are constrained by systems that lead us further and further from each other and from nature. Joan McIntyre laments: "In the end, it may be our loneliness as much as our greed which will destroy us."⁹

Pope Francis offers a vision of Earth community wrapped in mercy but it will remain an idealistic vision unless there is a profound change in human consciousness. Our whole sense of "location" of human selfhood has to be reordered in a way that is consonant with the Big Bang universe from which we have emerged. We will not care for the whole unless we are conscious of belonging to the whole. As Bruteau indicates, "an entire attitude and mind-set, a way of identifying self and others and perceiving the world has to shift first, before any talk of economic, political, and social arrangements can be considered."¹⁰ The type of consciousness needed is one that connects experience and thought, passion and logic, freedom and control; in short,

Mercy consciousness begins with recognizing that we are loved into being by a God of unconditional love; we are already mercified. Our challenge is to slow down, unplug our electronic devices, and become conscious of the unity that draws us to more life.

an integration of left brain and right brain activities. Anything other than a radical shift in collective consciousness will be futile.

CONCLUSION: WHOLENESS AND MERCY

In our fast-paced, brain-fatigued world, how can we focus our minds on God-Omega? Etty Hillisum wrote: "Ultimately, we have just one moral duty: to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves. . .and to reflect it towards others."¹¹ Without working toward an inner oneness with God, life becomes an unending series of little distractions. We sit at meetings or in churches but our minds are elsewhere, in other universes.

Gospel mercy demands a higher plane of consciousness, a new type of person, free of egocentrism and living from an inner core of unity. We are invited to surrender our egos to the power of divine love. We have the capacity for a new world but do we have the will? Do we want to be brother and sister to the poor and homeless or to share our wealth in an equitable manner? Do we want a greener Earth? On the present level of partial consciousness, I do not think so. We need a whole mind for a whole Earth which means we have to de-engineer our thinking and examine how mechanistically we are oriented, even in our treatment of one another.

We can destroy the Earth by selfish, unconscious existence or we can help unify it by training our minds for higher levels of conscious love. Brain management is as important today as managing our money. Our minds not only make a difference, they make the world. If the Church wants to see a new Earth empowered by mercy then we need a renewed sense of catholicity, developing a new theology consonant with the new cosmology. To put mind back into matter may be our greatest challenge today, especially in an age of artificial intelligence.

Mercy consciousness begins with recognizing that we are loved into being by a God of unconditional love; we are already mercified. Our challenge is to slow down, unplug our

electronic devices, and become conscious of the unity that draws us to more life. We are in a great cosmic whole together—Jews, Muslims, Christians, black, white, birds, bears, frogs and flowers—the whole Earth. We are here to become conscious of the whole, to give voice to the whole, and to help make this unfinished universe more whole by loving the world, especially the weak, the poor and the lame.

The left brain cannot know the whole, only the right brain can or, better yet, the whole mind knows the whole earth when it dwells in the heart of love. When we live from the heart we realize that every person is brother and sister; we are part of them and they are part of us. As we continue to awaken to this unity, God rises up as the God of the whole. We have the capacity to be a new Earth community if we choose to join in the ongoing maturity of life. The divine love that moves the stars and galaxies is the love that beckons us to cocreate a new future, a new planetary consciousness of life, wrapped in the arms of merciful love.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION


As I deal with daily experiences of “fragmentation” and the burdens of endless details and schedules, can I also believe in a larger – often hidden – “wholeness” of my person, our lives and our destiny?

What does “personal ecology” mean in my life at this time? In what way do I need a conversion to a different way of thinking about how I “belong” to this world with all its mysteries and challenges?



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ENGENDERING A MYSTIC AND PROPHETIC INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

Mary Ellen Sheehan, IHM, STD

BEGINNING WITH THE ENDNOTES

Following the footnotes or endnotes in a document can lead a reader to the deeper veins of the writer's thought; the endnotes of Pope Francis' Encyclical open a rich treasure house of sources. Pope Francis roots his teaching in the Scriptures and by invoking his recent predecessors, from St. John XXIII to Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

But Pope Francis also breaks new ground. By referring to the work of a wide array of national Bishops' Conferences – from Southern Africa to Germany, from the Philippines to Canada, from Argentina to the United States, he outlines the breadth, depth and complexity of the issues. He also invokes the commitment of other traditions to environmental consciousness, citing in particular Bartholomew I, the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Eastern Church. Pope Francis also recognizes the significance of the Earth Charter, promulgated by the United Nations in 2000. Thus, while writing as the head of the Roman Catholic Church, he also reaches out for international collaboration in cultivating ecological consciousness and committed action.



Equally intriguing are other references that encourage a contemplative approach to the question of “environment.” Pope Francis cites a ninth century Muslim Sufi poet, Ali al-Khawwas; a twelfth century Church reformer, St. Francis of Assisi; a thirteenth century contemplative Franciscan theologian, Bonaventure; and a twentieth century Jesuit scientist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin – all of whom speak of nature in ways that show it to be, “unfolding in God, who fills it completely.” Paraphrasing Ali al-Khawwas, the Pope continues, “... there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face.” (233).

A CONTEMPLATIVE APPROACH

It is this mystical approach that I would like to explore with a particular accent on the French Jesuit scientist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955). Pope Francis refers to him twice in *Laudato Si'*, something interesting in its own right since Teilhard’s writings were under suspicion by the Church and never allowed to be published during his lifetime. Both references to him are by allusion rather than direct quotation. In section 83, Pope Francis writes that “the ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the Risen Christ ...” While the statement is in harmony with the Scriptures it also resonates with the scientific and theological synthesis of Teilhard, and acknowledged as well by Blessed Paul VI, St. John Paul II, and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI (note 53).

In section 236, Pope Francis unfolds the mystical dimensions of the Eucharist, calling it ‘the living center of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life. Joined to the

Incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God. Indeed the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love.” Then, quoting St. John Paul, Pope Francis writes: “Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world.” (Note 166). This is a clear allusion to Teilhard’s famous Mass on the World, inspired when he was working in the Mongolian desert in 1923 on the Feast of the Transfiguration. With no bread, wine or altar to offer the Eucharist, Teilhard saw in a new way the link of the materiality of the earth with the deepest levels of the Eucharistic celebration. “I, your priest,” he prayed, “will make the whole Earth my altar and on it will offer you all the labors and sufferings of the world.”

Pondering these two references to Teilhard provoked the question: Would reading *Laudato Si'* through a Teilhardian lens engender a contemplative grasp of this Encyclical and ground even more deeply a prophetic commitment to its message? Teilhard’s life as a whole sings with praise and love and fidelity, even in the tough times of being on the frontline of warfare in 1915, losing his beloved family members and friends while he was thousands of miles away, and enduring misunderstanding and suspicion from the Church he deeply loved. His was a life always committed to wholeness and hope, dedicated to service, infused with a vibrant love of God.

TEILHARD’S EARLY CALL TO WHOLENESS

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was born in 1881, the fourth of eleven children, in a small village in the Auvergne region of central France, a mostly rural area with extensive forests and extant volcanoes. He grew up in a devoted Catholic family who celebrated the natural rhythms of life, caring for each other with affection, and taking delight in exploring nature. Early in his life, Teilhard developed a fascination with rocks, an interest he shared with his father. Teilhard later wrote that even as a small child he loved following the clouds in the sky and he knew the names of all the stars. From his father, he said, he received a gift of balance and a thirst

for scientific knowledge. Teilhard also loved his mother whom he credits with instilling in him a deep and abiding love for God, and particularly through devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and in Eucharistic prayer. Teilhard often referred to these Auvergne years as a very special time when he received his foundational insights on the beauty and power of matter as radiating the Divine.

This graced experience unfolded more fully in the decades that followed as he discovered how his love for science and for God could come together in his vocational attraction to the Society of Jesus. Inspired by his family and his Jesuit teachers, Teilhard joined the Jesuits in 1899. Over the next several years, he embraced the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, marked with a special accent on the primacy of the love of God and a concurrent commitment to moving service for the glory of God. He enjoyed education in science, languages and the arts and he taught for several years in Egypt. Then he moved to England to study philosophy and theology in preparation for his ordination which occurred in 1911. Continuing to study science in Paris, he became a paleontologist. He travelled the world but more critically began an inner journey that took him into the heart of matter and the heart of the matter, the relationship of science and faith as it was unfolding in the early twentieth century.

This deeply mystical and world-focused spirituality and his scientific knowledge as a paleontologist led him to write from both theological and scientific points of view. He often blended them in ways that made both scientists and Church authorities uncomfortable. Scientists criticized him for making claims that

went beyond the strictly empirical method and Church authorities often held him in suspicion of heresy as he pushed beyond approved boundaries regarding original sin. He persisted, nevertheless, in his research and writing and he remained faithful to Ignatian prayer, to his vows, and to honest dialogue with and respect for his religious superiors.

Teilhard died in New York City on Easter Sunday, 1955. He had been living there for a few years with a Jesuit community, sent by his religious superior into a kind of exile from Paris where his writings and lectures were causing a stir among Church authorities. Thankfully, Teilhard always had very good friends among his Jesuit brothers and professional colleagues who saw a way to preserve his writings and to publish them very soon after his death. These writings provide us with many of the rich strands of his thought on matter and its relationship to God. He wrote factually, poetically, and from a depth of theological reflection that opened up new ways to see and to live as a Christian. Which brings us back to the intriguing question: What of his vision inspired *Laudato Si'*?

FROM COSMOS TO COSMOGENESIS

Teilhard's early fascination with rocks flowered into a focused study of geology and paleontology. Over the years, he joined many onsite research teams, including one in China that studied the fossil discoveries that were eventually called The Peking Man. Always perceptive and reflective, the knowledge that emerged from these experiences led him to grasp the reality and significance of evolution as a fact. As he declared in a 1937 essay, no honest scientist could possibly conclude anything other than the assertion that human


Pope Francis unfolds the mystical dimensions of the Eucharist, calling it 'the living center of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life...Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world.'

beings emerged slowly from a long evolutionary process. He declared such a conviction even though the theory of evolution was far from accepted by Church authorities and most theologians at that time. How then would he reconcile the truth of his life as a scientist and the truth of his life as a committed Jesuit priest? The resolution of this tension unfolded slowly but surely over the span of his life.

Teilhard testified many times throughout his life how his passion to understand matter, energy, and light held him captive intellectually. Gradually, he came to see them as dynamically interrelated, that in fact everything that is relates in matter. Energy as a physical process links everything together; it radiates inward to create mass and outward to move matter forward into more and more complexity. Rather provocatively, as early as 1919, he wrote that he thought of the cells of his body as not his alone but as what connects him to the universe, that in fact he possessed the universe partially through his body. In other words, while recognizing particularity or distinctness, he also saw that all such particularity cannot be in itself without its broader connection with everything else through matter.

Gradually, Teilhard saw the need to set aside the word *Cosmos* for a new term, *Cosmogenesis*. *Cosmos*, he declared, suggests that the universe is an object, a "fixed thing, while in fact there is nothing at all static about it. *Cosmogenesis* is more accurate because the universe is an ongoing process of continuous birthing energy from which all that is has come into being - from the smallest and simplest to the largest and most complex, from primordial elements to stars and suns and planets and life, emerging in a myriad of forms. Very early, Teilhard caught the dynamics of ongoing creation. His study of the past in fossil research and his probing curiosity about the future brought him to scientific understanding and also to the question of what such ongoing evolution means.

From cosmogenesis Teilhard moved forward into naming the emerging life as biogenesis, a word already in use by some scientists of



his time. Through the long evolutionary process, biogenesis produces an ever increasing complexity, including anthropogenesis or homogenesis, the emergence of human beings. With the human has come another level of increased complexity, consciousness capable of knowing that it knows. And thus began the emergence of mind or the noosphere, and all that has come and is to come from it, the complex forms of human socialization and the ongoing development of civilization.

FROM CHRISTOS TO CHRISTOGENESIS

As his scientific knowledge deepened, Teilhard asked himself many times: How does this ever evolving birthing process, this scientific truth, correlate with my experience and understanding of God, with my religious truth? His move into this territory is a dramatic and compelling one, one that emerged from his love of Scripture, his faithful practice of meditative prayer, and his ongoing discernment as a Jesuit. In response to such questions, Teilhard introduced a number of theological claims into the scientific narrative which allowed for a more dynamic understanding of faith and a more integrated commitment to both scientific and faith as equally valid and compatible forms of knowledge.

One such move was to shift from seeing energy only as a physical power into seeing it also as a spiritual power. Physical energy manifests



itself outwardly in matter and propels itself forward through attraction into ever increasing complexity; such a force can also be called "love," the most foundational source of attraction. Teilhard began to see the whole unfolding of the universe as a process of what he called amorization derived from the Latin, amor, for love. Drawing inspiration from Scripture, and especially the Johanine corpus, he made an intimate connection between God who is love, who created from love, and who continues to create through the ongoing dynamics of evolution. God is not the universe and the universe is not God, but God and the universe are intimate in the dynamics of love.

Teilhard also retrieved his long held love of the mystery of the Incarnate God to enhance even more the divine character of ongoing creation. Drawing on both St. John and the epistles of St. Paul, he raised to new levels the sense of God-among-us in Christ: from the beginning as Word; in time through his human birth, life, suffering, death, and resurrection; and at the end as the plenitude or fullness of the Omega point of all of evolution. In effect, Christ has both a human and cosmic body that unites all in the radical originating love of God. Christ is and is also still becoming, as the universe is and is also still becoming and we in the Body of Christ are and are still becoming.

While many scientists, even today, credit Teilhard with an extraordinary understanding of the meaning of matter and energy as connecting everything and propelling all things forward in

ongoing evolution, most would not follow him regarding his religious claims. For believers, though, who do not see a necessary conflict between these two kinds of knowledge, this layering of the scientific narrative as fact into texts of Scripture as revelation is a compelling invitation to go deeper into both narratives.

A SPIRITUALITY OF ENGAGED FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE

Teilhard also wrote compellingly about what Christogenesis means for homogenesis, for human development. He called this a process of divinization. Just as evolution is enervated by the love of God coursing through matter, so are we destined to come into an ever fuller realization of who we already are in God. We emerged as a species through homogenesis as good and we emerged in our own specific births as good. We live in the Divine Milieu. Through matter, we are connected to all that is and through noos, our special complex consciousness, we are called to contribute to the ongoing process of Christogenesis, to participate with God in creating more life, light and love on our Earth.

As early as 1916, Teilhard reflected profoundly on the reality of our incorporation into the Body of Christ. Strikingly, he urged that "the mystical Body of Christ should in fact be conceived as a physical Reality in the strongest sense that words can bear." The Incarnation of God in Christ intensifies the goodness of matter and makes everything new. "The world is still being created and it is Christ who is reaching his fulfillment in it." Teilhard wrote that when he pondered this thought and grasped it, he "looked around and saw, as though in an ecstasy, that through all nature I was immersed in God." Even the horror of his war experience did not prevent this truth from arising in him. This certainty also led him to recognize the profound and wonderful call we have to collaborate with each other in Christ. We are in fact designed "to work for the greatest advancement of the earth," to "become conscious of our infinite capacity to carry ourselves still further, to realize the duties it involves," and to "feel its intoxicating wonder."

As Teilhard wrote in the *Divine Milieu*, “A thought, a material improvement, a harmony, a unique nuance of human love, the enchanting complexity of a smile or a glance – all new beauties that appear for the first time on the face of the earth.”

If Teilhard consistently showed a passionate zest for life and the beauty of our world, he was also acutely aware of what he called our passivities. These are the full range of things that happen to us and which strain our sense of well-being and enjoyment, taking us at times even into darkness and despair. He wrote tellingly of our inner tendencies to hamper or shut down our growth or to collapse in grief from the weight of loss, severe illness or to cower away from the sheer force of diminishment that takes us inevitably toward death. He made the connections with similar processes in nature: a living tree bears some decaying leaves and some dead branches at the same time that it is also producing fruit.

But again, Teilhard goes ever deeper, straight to the heart of enduring our passivities: the reality of Christ who is with us in our physicality through his own death and his resurrection, ready to transform all our suffering into surrendering union. Our activities and our passivities come together in our human developing and thus continue the process of Christogenesis in the ongoing unfolding of our universe. This is the ground of all hope and of all courageous and committed action.

TEILHARD AND AN INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

The knowledge of science and the knowledge of faith come together in Teilhard: The love of God flowing through all of matter is at one and the same time differentiating everything but

also connecting everything. He saw that this love is always there, ready to be invoked and directed toward the life and beauty of our planet. But he also recognized the reality of sin, the human capacity to turn away from the good by controlling matter and twisting it into destruction and death for power or profit.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis evidences a similar awareness, citing specifically the crisis of climate change with its devastating chain of consequences that threaten the very survival of our biosphere. He pleads for what he calls an integrated ecology wherein concern for social justice and ecological care come together into one reality that requires a new commitment from the whole human family. No longer can care for the poor be separated from care for our Earth and neither can one or the other be prioritized. With the passion of a prophet, he condemns our long standing and widespread misuse of nature in the name of improving human development. He warns that political and social systems are threatened today by the overarching power of distorted economic systems which favor the few and forget about the ethics of guaranteeing fair distribution for the common good.

But also in the prophetic tradition, Francis speaks of hope. He calls for dialogue (163-201) and conversion (202-246), for a return to the integrity of creation, for a commitment to a spirituality that “can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world.” (216). He challenges us to live from a contemplative core: “Nature is filled,” he writes, “with words of love,” and “integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with nature, reflecting our life style and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us

We are all priestly people transforming and consecrating ourselves and every particle of creation by the way we let Christ's love and wisdom “play” and “work” through us.

and surrounds us, whose presence “must be found, uncovered.” (225)

END NOTES, THE BEGINNING

Yes, the “end notes,” of *Laudato Si* leave a trail of insights; in their very humble and almost hidden way they remind us that we today stand on the shoulders of mystics, thinkers and “ordinary” workers. We are all priestly people transforming and consecrating ourselves and every particle of creation by the way we let Christ’s love and wisdom “play” and “work” through us. And like the end notes themselves, we ourselves are still just the beginning of an evolution of love; someday we will be the endnote of other authors and editors. For now, praised be the Lord!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. “Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation...”
In the Eucharist do I see the way creation and redemption – literally – “work” together: ordinary necessities of daily living become holy gifts that nourish and connect us to God and others?
2. Pope Francis has written that “our relationship with the environment can never be isolated from our relationship with others and with God” (119) Do I believe that I can never be a fully developed person without a loving bond with nature and doing my part to keep the economy as balanced and just as possible for all people?
3. Sr. Sheehan notes that Teilhard de Chardin understood evolution as incorporating the growth of Christ’s presence and love. Although she only hints at this point, she touches on the question of limitation and loss; she reminds us that for Teilhard, all life “moves forward” by a certain “letting go” or “dying.” How do I feel about my own personal “diminishment” for the sake of the building up of Church and world?



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ECOLOGY: CONVERSION TO THE EARTH

[Volume 1, Chapter 1, CS]



INTRODUCTION: A PAINFUL PARADOX

A beautiful metaphor for the world as God's beloved creation comes from the imagination of the fourteenth century English mystic and theologian Julian of Norwich. At one point she had a vision in which Christ put the world into her hand in the form of a little nut:

And in this [Christ] showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed to me, and it was as round as a ball. I looked at it with the eye of my understanding and thought: What can this be? I was amazed that it could last, for I thought that because of its littleness it would suddenly have fallen into nothing. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and always will, because God loves it; and thus everything has being through the love of God.

Thanks to its roots in Jewish creation faith, Christian belief has always looked upon the natural world as the beloved handiwork of God. Its beauty, fecundity, and gorgeous diversity have always been taken to reveal something of the greatness of the Creator. This revelation, furthermore, points not to someone at a distance but intimately near, for the Creator Spirit dwells within the world, continuously breathing life into all things, holding them in existence.

In our day this sacramental view of the natural world has taken on crucial significance in the light of growing ecological awareness. The word 'ecological' is derived from the Greek word *oikos*, which means household or home. It conveys the idea that the Earth is home for human beings, our only home in the vast universe. This planet is also home to an extraordinary array of life, including bacteria and fungi, plants and insects, and animals, which interact with human beings, with each other, and with the soil, water, and air of their neighborhoods to form distinct ecosystems.

Ecological consciousness reached an irreversible turning point with the wondrous pictures of planet Earth taken by orbiting spacecraft. Here we are, a blue marble swirled around with white clouds against a black background of deep space, the only place we know of to date where life exists. Our "hazelnut" home is shared by more than eight million diverse species, over six million on land and two million in the ocean. All together we form one unique community of life on this third rock from the sun.

THE PROBLEM IS, THIS AWARENESS IS SHOT THROUGH WITH PAINFUL PARADOX

On the one hand, we stand in awe at discoveries about life on this planet. Think of life's age (3.5 billion years of evolution!); its diversity (millions of species, past and present!); its dynamism (the gradual emergence of ever more beautifully complex forms!); and its

interrelationships (all creatures on Earth genetically connected since we descend from a universal ancestor in the ancient seas!). Charles Darwin, who laid out the story of evolution so compellingly in his book *On the Origin of Species*, used the metaphor of a great tree of life to depict the result. Picture a spreading evolutionary tree that links all living creatures into an indivisible whole, spanning the ages. The outer layer of budding twigs and green leaves represents the multitudes of species alive today, topping out in the sun. Below are layers of dead and broken branches that once lived, giving rise to new life which they now support. And the story is not finished yet.

On the other hand, we stand sickened at the deadly damage human action is currently inflicting upon the life-systems of the Earth. Over-consumption of resources and pollution via poisons and sewage, coupled with burgeoning human populations, are ruining ecosystems of land, sea, and air, disrupting the places that other creatures need to live, find food, and reproduce. As a result many thousands of species are disappearing. Magnificent animals and little flowers which took millions of years to evolve are disappearing, and they will never come back again. The picture darkens as we attend to the deep-seated connection between ecological devastation and social injustice. In a global perspective, poor people suffer disproportionately from environmental degradation. Ravaging the poor and ravaging the land, plants, and animals on which they depend go hand in hand. In the blunt language of the World Council of Churches, "The stark sign of our times is a planet in peril at our hands" (Canberra Assembly, 1990).

CHALLENGE TO CONVERSION

In this paradoxical context of wonder and waste, a crucial question presses itself upon persons who are spiritually alert: what has happened to our belief that

The word 'ecological' is derived from the Greek word *oikos*, which means household or home. It conveys the idea that the earth is home for human beings, our only home in the vast universe.



this very same natural world, gorgeous and distressed, is creation? Theology calls the natural world not simply nature but creation, a religious word that places all living beings in relationship to their Creator. Why has this belief not stirred more religious people and their institutional resources to responsible care for the Earth?

The basic need is to foster a spirituality that makes loving the Earth an intrinsic part of faith in God, rather than an add-on.

In June 2015 Pope Francis issued a magnificent encyclical on this subject entitled *Laudato Si'*: On Care for Our Common Home. The title itself contains an evocative teaching. The Italian *Laudato Si'*, Praise be to you, is taken from the canticle of St. Francis of Assisi which begins, "Praise be to you my Lord, with all your creatures." Note that God is being praised not for all the creatures, and not through them but with them (*cum*, in the original Umbrian dialect). Already we are being presented with a view of creation drenched in the living presence of God. The subtitle then underscores the ecological responsibility human beings have for our *oikos*, the home that we share with all other creatures.

In my view this is the most important encyclical ever written in the history of the Catholic Church. In the face of strong political and religious obstacles, it takes the measure of the critically real danger the ecological crisis poses to life on this planet. With tremendous scope it tackles the economic, political, cultural, sociological, scientific, psychological, philosophical, spiritual, ethical, and theological dimensions of the crisis. It ends by calling with joy for a new way of being human that will enhance rather than diminish the life of other creatures with whom we share a common home. This encyclical issues, in essence, a profound call to conversion to the Earth.

Conversion usually meets with resistance. In this case, apart from the ethical challenge of how hard it is for those in economically privileged nations to overcome selfish practices of consumerism, waste, and greed, I think there is also theological resistance. One major obstacle is the traditional teaching that places human beings at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of creation with the God-given right to have dominion over other creatures. This understanding sits underneath Christian doctrine like a drowned continent affecting all the currents around it.

An intriguing story about the nineteenth century American naturalist John Muir crystallizes the problem. Once when Muir was hiking in the Yosemite wilderness, he came upon a dead bear. He stopped to reflect on this creature's dignity: an animal with warm blood and a heart that pumped like ours, who rejoiced to feel the warm sun on his fur, for whom a good day was finding a bush filled with berries. Later he wrote a bitter entry in his journal, criticizing the religious folk he knew who made no room in their faith for such noble creatures. They think they are the only ones with souls, he complained, the only ones for whom heaven is reserved. To the contrary, he wrote, "God's charity is broad enough for bears." Not many agreed.

OBSTACLE

What is a human being and how should humans relate to the rest of creation? In strong language *Laudato Si'* criticizes traditional views as "inadequate" and frankly "wrong" because "Often what was passed on was a Promethean vision of mastery over the world ..." (116). In the traditional view other creatures do not have intrinsic value, or value in their own right before God. Rather, they have only instrumental value, being created only for our use. Even before the encyclical appeared, a good deal of recent scholarship has tried to figure out why, given the doctrine of creation, this devaluing has come to be the case. The primary culprit usually fingered is ancient Greek philosophy which early Christian theology encountered and then employed in its missionary efforts in the Hellenistic world.

In a twofold step this influential philosophy sees everything in binary terms of spirit and matter and, because spirit is purer and closer to the divine, it privileges spirit over matter. The result of such dividing and ranking is a picture of creation as a great chain of being with inanimate matter at the lowest level. Living plants rank next; animals are higher yet, because the matter of their body is animated by greater spirit. Humans, gifted with a rational soul joined to a physical body, stand highest on Earth. Without bodies, angels rank even higher still. God who is pure spirit is the apex of the whole.

Note that the spirituality connected with this thought pattern is pervaded by the dynamism of ascent. To be holy a person must flee the material world and rise to the spiritual sphere where the light of divinity dwells. One must turn away from one's own body and the Earth; in

other words, in order to have communion with God. As this view took hold, creation diminished in importance.

Ecofeminists add another troubling angle by analyzing how this philosophy associates matter with what is feminine and spirit with what is masculine. It thus ranks the natural world along with women on the underside of the matter-spirit dualism. Both women and the natural world are meant to serve men who by their proper nature are more rational, and thus more spiritual, and hence equipped to rule.

Starting in the sixteenth century, theology gave this view a new twist by crafting an imperialistic interpretation of Genesis. After creating the human couple male and female, God gives them the mandate to have "dominion" over the rest of life (Gen 1:26). In the so-called Age of Exploration when European nations began to colonize other continents, their aggressive entrepreneurial culture interpreted dominion to mean domination over nature. Resources in other lands were there to be extracted. Plants and animals became sources of profit. Not to be missed is the way elite peoples also applied this mandate to other human beings: white men had the right to dominate, and enslave, darker, indigenous peoples. European theology supported this view.

I find it daunting to realize how deeply this view of human beings as rulers of nature has shaped contemporary Christian belief and practice. With roots deep in philosophy and theology, it largely erased creation from the faith experience and therefore the ethical concern of most believers, opening the door to unbridled exploitation without ecclesial protest. By contrast, *Laudato Si'* points out that the Jesus of the gospels was "far removed from philosophies which despised the body, matter, and the things of this world. Such unhealthy dualisms, nonetheless, left a mark on certain Christian thinkers in the course of history and disfigured the Gospel" (par. 98; I think the Pope was being kind; almost all Christian thinkers thought this way). Instead, the encyclical teaches we are meant to live in mutual relation with other creatures, sharing together in "one splendid universal communion" (220). Even the donkey and ox are to rest on the sabbath.

THE COMMUNITY OF CREATION

To convert both mind and heart to this different sense of community, it is helpful first of all to revisit the Genesis text where God tells the human couple to





have dominion. Biblical scholarship informs us that the idea comes from a practice of the royal court. If a king had a large territory to govern, he would assign representatives to distant areas to make sure the king's decrees were being observed. Such regents were said to have dominion over the territory. They were responsible to govern in the name of the king. In Genesis, God has just carefully created all creatures on land, sea and air, and declares them all to be very good. The mandate to the human couple to have dominion, far from signifying domination, places them in a relationship of care and protection in the name of the Creator. They are to carry out the wishes of the Creator that the world and its creatures should flourish.

Even in this beneficial sense, dominion itself is not the major biblical paradigm for the relation of human beings to other creatures. Apart from Psalm 8 the idea rarely reappears. Much more prevalent is the vision of the community of creation. Found throughout the prophets, psalms, and wisdom writings, this view positions humans in the first instance not above but within the living world, all of whom receive the breath of life from the same Creator. The governing image is not a triangle with humans at the apex, but a circle with humans as part of the whole. In the community of creation, the center is the living God. Centuries of dominion-talk make it difficult to wrap our minds around this, but in view of every creature's deepest identity as a creature, human beings and other species have more in common than what separates us. In complex interactions each gives and receives, being significant for one another in different ways. In this view, where humans are first of all fellow-creatures,

responsible care becomes a role within the larger sphere of community relationships.

THE BOOK OF JOB

No biblical book presents the community of creation more eloquently than the book of Job. As the ancient folk tale unfolds, Job is suffering loss on every front: health, possessions, children. In a debate with his friends that grows ever more acrimonious, he maintains that he has done nothing sinful to deserve this punishment. In anguish he mounts a lawsuit, challenging God to appear in court to defend the way the world is ordered.

"Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind" (Job 38:1).

The answer is unexpected. In gorgeous poetic language over the course of four chapters (38-41), the divine voice describes a world that does not pivot around human beings, starting with the daunting question: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the Earth?" (38:4). The queries roll on: Where were you when the Earth was measured out, when the stars began to sing, when the sea was placed within boundaries and its proud waves given limits? Do you command the sun to rise at dawn? The snow and rain to fall? Orion and the other constellations to run their course across the sky? Do you give food to the lions when they hunt? Do wild asses, mighty horses, or soaring hawks and eagles bow to your will? In them all God takes delight. They do not obey Job.

As centuries of profound commentary on this book have made clear, this magnificent view of the created

world does not resolve the problem of the suffering of an innocent person. Instead, it places Job's pain in the context of God's powerful nearness in cosmic creation. Stunned by his encounter with great beauty, he is taken out of himself and given a broader vision of the universe and God's ways with it. This expands Job's horizon to the point where he grasps that God's love does not act according to human rules of retribution, but operates freely in a world of grace that completely enfolds and permeates him, even in pain. With new clarity of vision, his story moves toward healing and peace.

In view of the Church's long acceptance of matter-spirit dualism and the paradigm of dominion as domination, Pope Francis recognizes that he is challenging traditional interpretations of scripture by emphasizing the community of creation. *Laudato Si'* states: even if "we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures" (67, italics in the original). Instead, he writes, "we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God's eyes" (par. 69). He continues, "In our time the Church does not simply state that other creatures are completely subordinate to the good of human beings, as if they had no worth in themselves and can be treated as we wish" (69). Rather, "They have an intrinsic value independent of their usefulness" (140). And why? Because God loves them. Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of God's love, and in its few seconds of existence, God enfolds it with affection" (77).

We need to reclaim the ancient biblical realization that other species are a source of revelation: Each one reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness" (par. 69). They are also a place where we can encounter God: Since "the Spirit of life dwells in them," they are a "locus of divine presence," calling us into relationship (88). The theocentric view of creation comes to its climax with ringing hope. We human beings have the responsibility to care for all other species because "the final purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward, with us and through us, towards a common point of arrival, which is God" (83).

CONVERSION TO THE EARTH

The evolutionary story of plants and animals on this planet is not over. To a large extent human agency is now part of this story, and at this point we are failing our kin. One example: before humans emerged, the background

Facing ecological ruination, we need a deep conversion, not away from the Earth toward God as the traditional model would have it, but a conversion toward the Earth, in love with a God who loves the Earth. This conversion involves numerous turnings at once... Intellectually... Emotionally...Practically...

extinction rate of species was about one a year. In 2010, a United Nations estimate put the current extinction rate at 23,000 species a year. Killing an individual ends its life in death. But making a species go extinct ends its birth. As Pope Francis writes in *Laudato Si'*, "Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost forever." Moreover, "thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence" (33). This should be a source of our own personal suffering (19).

In the perspective of Christian faith, the current destruction of life on Earth has the character of deep failure. To speak scientifically, we are wiping out the fruit of millions of years of evolution on Earth and shutting down its future. To speak philosophically, this is a moral failure; ethicists have coined new words to name the violence: biocide, ecocide, geocide. To speak theologically, this destruction is profoundly sinful, contradicting the will of the Creator that the world should flourish. Sacrilege and desecration are not too strong a designation. The Catholic bishops of the Philippines even name the despoilation an insult to Christ: "the destruction of any part of creation, especially the extinction of species, defaces the image of Christ which is etched in creation."

In terms of Christian spirituality, the turn from sin to a life marked by grace is known as conversion. As the New Testament term for conversion (*metanoia*, turning) indicates, this also demands a swiveling, switching away from one path and choosing another. Facing ecological ruination, we need a deep conversion, not away from the Earth toward God as the traditional model would have it, but a conversion toward the Earth, in love with a God who loves the Earth. This conversion involves numerous turnings at once.

~ **INTELLECTUALLY**, conversion entails turning from a merely human-centered view of the world to a wider, God-centered view that has room for other species to be included in the circle of what is religiously meaningful. This means letting go of a philosophy shaped by dualism that prizes spirit over matter, in favor of one that also intensely values physical and bodily realities as God's good creation. Rather than setting up an either-or relationship between God and the world, this intellectual turning honors the presence of the Giver of life in the evolving community of species, and sees the Creator reflected in their lives.

~ **EMOTIONALLY**, being converted to the Earth involves a turning from the delusion that we humans are an isolated species to a felt affiliation with the whole community. We need to feel love and wonder at other creatures, not because they are like us but precisely in their difference. Albert Einstein charts the necessary turn: "Our task must be to free ourselves from our [egotistic] prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty." In the depths of our being we need to recover a capacity for communion with the natural world, to the point where brother sun and sister moon, brother wolf and little sister bird are more than poetic ways of speaking but felt truths, as with Francis of Assisi.

~ **PRACTICALLY**, conversion makes us turn from a moral universe limited to human persons to recenter vigorous moral consideration on the whole community of life. Recognizing that we are kin, we start to preserve and protect creation not just because it is useful to us but because it has its own intrinsic value. This entails personal choices about how we decide to spend money, heat our homes, travel, run a business, vote. In the tradition of biblical prophecy and the spirit of Jesus, it also means public actions that counter destruction and promote nature's healing, even if this goes counter to powerful economic and political interests ... and it does.

Simply put, ecological conversion means falling in love with the Earth as an inherently valuable, living community in which we participate, and bending every effort to be creatively faithful to its well-being. Being converted to the Earth entails more than an ascetic or moral mandate. It is a call to deeper relationship to God the Creator of heaven and Earth, a relationship that transforms us toward great-heartedness toward other creatures, in resonance with the Love who made and empowers it all. Action on behalf of eco-justice then becomes an inseparable part of religious living.

CONCLUSION

We have done theology by looking in the mirror at our human selves, our needs, and the good news of our salvation. Well and good. But now it is urgently time to look out the window and behold that we are part of a bigger, religiously meaningful world. A flourishing humanity, on a thriving Earth filled with life, in an evolving universe, all together filled with the glory of God: such is the global vision we need to be converted

to in this critical age of Earth's distress. Our immediate practical aim should be to establish and protect healthy ecosystems where all creatures, including poor human beings, can thrive. The long-term goal is a socially just and environmentally sustainable society in which the needs of all people are met and species in the natural environment can prosper, onward to an evolutionary future that can still surprise. Toward those ends, the Christian community needs to re-weave the natural world into our religious imaginations so that prayer and liturgy, parenting and pastoring, teaching and preaching, art and music, personal choices as well as political and economic practice will promote Earth's flourishing. Ignoring the deeply religious call to be converted to the Earth keeps us locked into irrelevance while a terrible drama of life and death is being played out in the real world. By contrast, living the ecological vocation sets us off on a great adventure of mind and heart, expanding the repertoire of our love. We haven't a moment to lose.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Have I ever thought about the connection of "left-overs" being wasted and the way our society treats some people as "left-overs?"
2. Anglican Archbishop Rowan Williams has commented that the Pope's Encyclical is not so much about the "environment" but about our souls, about how we pray. Do you agree? Sr. Johnson challenges us to a "conversion to the Earth" – what would that mean for you?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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GOD SO LOVED THE COSMOS

Dianne Bergant, CSA



SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT LESSONS LEARNED

In a powerful scene from the movie *Titanic*, the hero stands fearlessly on the bow of the gargantuan ship and cries out: "I'm the king of the world!" It is really meant as a proclamation of freedom and exhilaration. However, the sentiment captures an attitude prominent in the world today. Now that human beings have successfully harnessed many of the forces that govern nature, we can easily delude ourselves into thinking we are supreme rulers over all other creatures. After all, we have intelligence and imagination, and they do not. In the past such attitudes were even illustrated in text books, both scientific and religious, by means of a pyramid showing mineral creation at the base of the figure, vegetation just above it, sentient creation slightly higher with humankind at the top. Subtly, many of us came to believe that "lower" levels of the natural world were created to serve the ends of the higher.

We are now facing serious issues that compel us to reexamine this manner of thinking. Frightening tornadoes and fierce hurricanes, devastating tsunami waves and torrential flooding, catastrophic fires and disastrous mud slides have forcefully reminded us that we are often helpless before such forces of nature. Are such catastrophes simply natural occurrences brought on by the combined forces of nature themselves? Or might they be the revenge of polluted nature turning its ravaged face on its polluters? These are not simply social or political questions. They are, at heart, religious questions.

RELIGION: PART OF THE PROBLEM OR THE ANSWER

In 1967, Lynn White, Jr., a professor of history at the University of California (LA), wrote an article in which he made some very condemning statements about our biblical tradition. His denunciation was based on a literal reading of one of the best-known biblical stories, the creation narrative in Genesis 1. He claimed that: "By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects." He further stated that this meant that "no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's (sic) purposes." Finally, he claimed that the Christian tradition "insisted that it is God's will that man (sic) exploit nature." While he named Saint Francis of Assisi as "the greatest radical in Christian history since Christ," he argued that: "More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one." Whether or not one agrees with this appalling condemnation of the Christian tradition or with White's radical urging that we find a new religion, one cannot fault his far-sightedness in critiquing – almost fifty years ago – human exploitation of the rest of the natural world. Science and technology have sometimes led us to believe that we can step outside of our environment to examine it and control it. It is important to remember that we do not merely live within our environment as we live within a building. We may be a unique dimension of the natural world, but we are not separate from it. We are part of it, and it is part of us. The world itself flows through us as breath and blood and



food. We are not disinterested bystanders but participants in the wondrous workings of nature. We did not weave the web of life; we are strands within it. We may be able to discover and direct many of the laws of nature, but we are still subject to them. We may be able in some ways to control these laws, but we cannot significantly alter them. What we can do, is alter the makeup of our own environment, those conditions, circumstances and influences surrounding and effecting our physical health and life.

We cannot deny that modern science and technology have enhanced human life. In many ways we are much better off because of them. However, we now know that this progress has sometimes been accomplished at the expense of various other species and ecosystems, and that exploitation has often been justified by a literal reading of God's directive found in the creation narrative ("subdue...and have dominion" – Gen 1:26, 28). Environmental concerns have inspired many religiously inclined people to look anew at their own faith traditions, and the faith traditions of others, in the hope of discovering there both inspiration and direction for more ecologically sensitive thinking and behavior.

One might ask: Why hasn't the Church responded to White's challenge? But, it has. As far back as



In 1971, Blessed Pope Paul VI referred to ecological deterioration as “a tragic consequence” of unchecked human activity. He insisted that, “Due to ill-considered exploitation of nature, humanity runs the risk of destroying it and becoming in turn a victim of this destruction.” In 1979, Saint John Paul called for global ecological conversion. Pope Emeritus Benedict followed the path carved out by his predecessors when he stated: “The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any higher instance than ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves.” Pope Francis himself has recently very strongly stated that in “our situation today...sin is manifested in...attacks on nature.” The leadership of the Church has responded; it is the vast majority of the membership of the Church that has been silent, and this has often been the result of a misreading of the Genesis directive.

PRE-READING GENESIS: SUBDUE AND HAVE DOMINION

The first creation account does indeed report that the first man and woman were told to “subdue... and have dominion.” However, it is important to understand what that directive meant within the context of that ancient story:

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”
Gen 1:26

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”
Gen 1:28

These two passages each contain two words whose meaning is crucial for understanding the role that human beings play as creatures of Earth. The two nouns (image and likeness) serve as identifiers; the two verbs (subdue and have dominion) point to behavior.

Mesopotamian myths tell of a god forming a mental image and then creating another god according to that image. This was a religious idea. There is also a political dimension to the notion of image of a god. Many ancient Near Eastern people believed that their king was either the direct descendant of the god or the god in human form. Kings were also often referred to as ‘son of god.’ Considered divinely appointed monarchs, kings often ruled in and over the land as gods. This commonly held view of monarchy throws light on Israel’s struggle when trying to establish its own monarchy (1 Samuel 8-10). If the monarchy was considered divine, Israel could not accept such a human ruler. The Israelites eventually reconciled elements of royal ideology with the notion of a human ruler, and they retained the idea of the king as a ‘son of god.’ However, the king was believed to be only an adopted or appointed son who was human, not divine (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7).

This perspective of monarchy throws new light on the meaning of the first creation narrative in Genesis. People of the ancient Near East often set up images of their divine monarchs. Such an image was regarded as merely a marker that identified the locale and extent of the sovereignty of the

divine ruler. (Today a national flag functions in a comparable manner. It is a symbol of authority and jurisdiction.) Although respect for this image often degenerated into worship of it as if it actually was the god, the image was initially considered merely a representation of the god that demonstrated some of its principal characteristics. For example, the Canaanites chose the bull to symbolize their god Baal, because of its male virility. The image was a symbol of the god; it possessed no authority of its own. The law of Israel banned the practice of fashioning such images, because it was so easy to slip into worshipping them, and such a practice jeopardized the exclusive worship of Israel's true God.

In the first creation account, the man and the woman are said to have been made in the image of God (1:26). While image of God has been interpreted in many ways down through the centuries, its original meaning probably had something to do with the way the people understood the relationship between the monarchy and God; the monarchy was considered the image of the god. In the Genesis story, the man and the woman themselves are not divine; they were images of God, symbolizing the sovereignty of God. The twofold directive that follows this description reinforces the royal motif. They are told to 'subdue (any threat that might arise) and have dominion' (as agents of God). "Subdue...and have dominion" are royal responsibilities. However, the man and the woman are not autonomous in their governance. Since an image represented the locale and extent of the sovereignty of the deity and not that of the image itself, the royal authority of the first couple was provisional and contingent on the good will of God. They were accountable to God for the way they would subdue and have dominion.

This interpretation of the biblical directive is exactly the opposite of any reading that suggests arrogant manipulation of the forces of nature or the abuse of any components of Earth. It points to responsibility, serious responsibility "over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth" (Gen 1:26). However, as image, there is also accountability to God. The first man and woman

were not satisfied being image; they wanted to be more like gods. This was the temptation posed by the serpent:

"...God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Gen 3:5

And it was the reason for their expulsion from the garden:

Then the Lord God said, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"-- therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken.

Gen 3:22-23

The sin may well have been disobedience; but the motivation for sinning was the desire to have the power and authority of God rather than the responsibility and accountability of the image of God.

THE SECOND CREATION NARRATIVE: SERVE AND GUARD

The setting of the second creation account (Genesis 2) is quite different from that of the first. Rather than a depiction of royalty, we have an agrarian scene. Initially the land is barren, for God had not yet sent life-giving rain and there was no one to cultivate the soil. The cooperation between God and human beings is clearly stated. God provides the water without which nothing can live, but the man is also important for he tills the land. Once the man is created and the garden is planted, God then places the man in the garden to serve it and to guard it. The first Hebrew verb is usually translated 'till,' because of the agricultural character of the story. However, the verb itself means 'serve.' It is the same verbal root from which the word 'servant' is derived. 'Serve' is preferred here because it highlights an aspect of responsibility and precludes any notion of autonomous manipulation or exploitation. The second verb 'guard' underscores this same sense of responsibility.





As important as the man may be for the care of the garden, he did not plant it, nor is he in full command of its growth. It was God who made “various trees grow that were delightful to look at and good for food” (Gen 2:9). The man was simply the caretaker of God’s fruitful creation, the beneficiary of God’s generosity. (Though ancient Israelite women were probably also involved in various aspects of agriculture, the patriarchal character of the society considered the man the representative of the entire society.) The final evidence of the human beings’ secondary role in the governance of Earth is seen at the end of this Genesis account where, because of their infidelity, the man and woman were cast out of the garden (3:23).

The Genesis 1 account might appear to focus primarily on image, what it means and how it functions; in other words, a focus on the relationship between human beings and God. The Genesis 2 account seems to stress the relationship between human beings and the rest of the natural world. This calls to mind the ecojustice principles articulated by the Australian ecotheologian Norman Habel and several of his associates. They are:

The principle of intrinsic worth which honors the value of Earth and all of its components in themselves and not in their usefulness to human beings. The garden and its fruits certainly did meet some of the needs of the man and woman, for it “was good for food...and a delight to the eyes” (Gen 3:6). The garden did not serve them; the man

and the woman were there to serve and guard the garden.

The principle of interconnectedness which recognizes the interdependence of members of the ‘community of Earth.’ A physical interconnectedness is clear in the fact that Adām, the trees, and eventually the animals were all made of the same stuff of Earth (2:7, 9, 19).

The principle of voice which appreciates the unique way each member of the ‘community of Earth’ expresses itself. Earth, which was initially barren (2:5) eventually brought forth various fruits. The principle of purpose which claims that all members of ‘community of Earth’ have a part in the dynamic cosmic design. Earth needed the cultivation provided by human beings. They in turn needed the fruits that Earth brought forth. The principle of mutual custodianship which acknowledges the role played by each member of ‘community of Earth’ in sustaining Earth’s delicate balance. The disruption of this balance is seen in the consequences of their unwillingness to accept their role as image of God rather than gods. Further signs of this rupture included enmity among creatures (3:15); men assuming a dominant position over women (3:16) and Earth yielding thorns and thistles (3:18).

The principle of resistance which maintains that Earth itself struggles against its manipulation and exploitation. Earth does this by refusing to yield healthy and abundant fruit.

This creation account reminds us that we are an integral part of a wondrous adventure called "life." However, we are only a part – an interconnected and interdependent part of a dynamic cosmic design.

COVENANT WITH EARTH

Scholars agree that the narrative of the flood and the eventual recession of the waters is yet another creation story. It comes from the same theological tradition as Genesis 1, and it highlights much of the same theology found in that earlier passage. In fact, in many ancient Near Eastern traditions, the flood narrative was identical with the creation narrative. In those narratives, the destructive flood was the primeval flood out of which the heavens and Earth were formed, and the people saved were the first created human beings. This suggests that both creation and the flood were viewed as primeval happenings with profound religious meaning, not historical events.

Israel's flood account contains some of the same vocabulary found in the Genesis 1 creation narrative. The abyss (tehôm) was in place before God separated the waters (Gen 1:2). This same abyss burst open causing the flood (Gen 7:11), and it was closed when God decreed its end (8:2). Both narratives mention a wind that swept over the cosmic abyss (1:2; 8:1). It was God's intention that the animals "be fertile and multiply" (1:22; 8:17). The same blessing with the commission to rule over the animals is given to humankind in both passages (1:28; 9:1-2). It is clear that both narratives belong to the same religious tradition.

It is in this flood tradition that the word 'covenant' first appears in the Bible. A covenant is a serious legal contract made between two parties. It usually includes some responsibilities. Covenants can be bilateral between peers or unilateral between a king and subjects or between a god and devotees. In these covenants, the responsibilities are normally the burden of the subordinate party. The covenant described in the flood account is quite unusual.

This is clear in God's words;

"I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you,

The principle of interconnectedness which recognizes the interdependence of members of the 'community of Earth.' A physical interconnectedness is clear in the fact that Adam, the trees, and eventually the animals were all made of the same stuff of Earth (Genesis 2:7, 9, 19).

as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”

Gen 9:9-13

First, this covenant is not made simply between God and Noah, but between God and Noah and his descendants. In other words, it is intergenerational, down through the generations, down to our own time. Second, it is not made simply with human beings, but with every living creature and Earth itself. Third, God makes a pledge and asks for nothing in return. God promises never to so overturn the order in the universe that a new act of creation would be necessary. In a very touching act of concern, God places a bow in the sky as a reminder for God, not for the other covenant partners. In the flood story, this bow becomes a rainbow, something peaceful and bountiful. As a creation story, the bow became the weapon of the divine warrior, victorious over the forces of primeval chaos. This interpretation is supported by several Mesopotamian artifacts depicting the arrows in the god’s quiver in the shape of lightning bolts. Hanging the bow (the archer’s bow) in the sky was a sign that the primeval war was over and all of creation could rest secure. Like the divine rest after creation (2:2-3), retirement of the bow heralded the establishment of order.

This account reminds us that the entire natural world is in covenant with God, and being in covenant with God means that all natural elements are in covenant with each other as well. Furthermore, the bow in the sky is a sign that

warring has ceased, the creator-God has restored order, and has promised to ensure that his order will endure.

LAUDATO SI'

“Praise be to you!” These are the opening words of Pope Francis’ recently released encyclical “On Care For Our Common Home.” In this document the Pope develops the very themes described in this essay. His interpretation of the “dominion” exercised by those created in the “image of God” corresponds with what has been said here:

Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures. (67) His interpretation of “till” (serve) and “keep” (guard) is also the same as the interpretation offered here: The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to “till and keep” the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15). “Tilling” refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while “keeping” means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. (67)

Although he does not comment explicitly on the Genesis account of the covenant made with Earth after the flood, the second section of chapter six is entitled ‘Educating for the Covenant Between Humanity and the Environment.’ Furthermore, two of the characteristics associated with covenant in the Genesis account are treated elsewhere in the Encyclical, interconnectedness (70) and interdependence (86).

Unfortunately, many people have not taken seriously the messages of the Genesis accounts, dismissing them as fanciful, make-believe stories

invented by primitive people. They have not understood that these myths are cultural ways of expressing profound truths. However, if read carefully, the accounts will reveal an accurate picture of humankind and its place in the vast universe. These accounts highlight the nobility of human beings as images of God with the responsibility of guardianship of Earth. They portray human 'down-to-Earthness' as having been brought forth from Earth, as well as mutual connectedness and dependency with all other Earth creatures. Finally, they tell of the great blessing bestowed on Earth and all Earth creatures through their intimate covenant relationship with God. If these accounts are read carefully, people will come to realize that it is only in the movies, that enterprise of fanciful, make-believe stories invented by very sophisticated people, that one can cry out, "I'm the king of the world!" They will then appreciate once again that, "The Earth is the LORD's and all that is in it" (Ps 24:1)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Do I ever meditate or wonder how I "share" all the elements of nature with the rest of creation and all other people – i.e. one same sun, moon, stars overhead, a common need for water and air; that I share "stardust" in my very body?
2. Sr. Bergant's essay has challenged us to notice the often subtle ways we mis-read Genesis. What new insights did she spark within your own pattern of thinking?
3. In her essay, Sr. Bergant uses "covenant" as a lens for understanding both the God-human relationship and also our rapport with nature itself: one enduring, all-encompassing covenant with ensuing responsibilities. Does that sense of covenant give new meaning and motivation for our concerns for environment? Does it deepen my sense of the Covenant of Eucharist?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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PIED BEAUTY

by Gerard Manley Hopkins

